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ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL
Substantive session of 1997
Geneva, 30 June-25 July 1997
Item 9 of the provisional agenda**
IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECLARATION ON THE GRANTING OF INDEPENDENCE TO COLONIAL COUNTRIES AND PEOPLES BY THE SPECIALIZED AGENCIES AND THE INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTIONS ASSOCIATED WITH THE UNITED NATIONS

Letter dated 9 June 1997 from the Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to draw your attention to the Seminar on Assistance to the Palestinian People, convened by the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, in accordance with its mandate to promote international support for and assistance to the Palestinian people during the transitional period. The Seminar was held from 20 to 22 May 1997 at Amman, Jordan.

The Seminar provided a forum for an exchange of experience and expertise on various aspects of the current challenges facing the Palestinian people in its efforts to promote sustainable human development, and on the role of international assistance in that regard, particularly in light of the growing hardships posed by the occupation. The Seminar was attended by donor and other Governments, intergovernmental organizations, organizations and entities of the United Nations system, officials of the Palestinian Authority, and

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non-governmental organizations active in the field, as well as experts from the region and elsewhere. The Committee considers that the Seminar was a useful gathering and hopes to have made a constructive contribution to international efforts aimed at promoting an improvement in the living conditions of Palestinians and in their prospects for economic development, which are essential for the achievement of a just and lasting peace in the region.

I have the honour to attach for your information the report of the Seminar (see annex). I should be grateful if you would have the text of the present letter, together with the report, circulated as a document of the General Assembly, under item 20 (d) of the preliminary list, and of the Economic and Social Council, under item 9 of the provisional agenda.

(Signed) Ibra Deguène KA
Chairman
Committee on the Exercise of
the Inalienable Rights of
the Palestinian People

ANNEX

Report of the United Nations Seminar on Assistance to the Palestinian People, held at Amman from 20 to 22 May 1997

Theme: Palestinian human development needs

CONTENTS

		Paragraphs	Page
I.	INTRODUCTION	1 - 16	2
	A. Organization of the Seminar	1	2
	B. Participation	2 - 9	2
	C. Agenda	10 - 11	3
	D. Opening of the Seminar	12 - 16	3
II.	PLENARY SESSION: MEETING PALESTINIAN HUMAN DEVELOPMENT NEEDS: THE ROLE OF THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY	17 - 30	5
III.	SUMMARY OF THE ROUND TABLES	31 - 55	6
	Round table I. Sustainable human development as the basis for nation-building	31 - 36	6
	Round table II. Promoting poverty eradication and sustainable development	37 - 48	8
	Round table III. Promoting gender equality and the full participation of women in society	49 - 55	11
IV.	CLOSING SESSION	56 - 59	13

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Organization of the Seminar

1. The Seminar on Assistance to the Palestinian People was convened by the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People in accordance with its mandate to promote international support for and assistance to the Palestinian people during the transitional period. The Seminar was held from 20 to 22 May 1997 in Amman.

B. Participation

2. The Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People was represented by a delegation comprising Mr. Ibra Deguène Ka (Senegal), Chairman; Mr. Bruno Eduardo Rodriguez Parrilla (Cuba), Vice-Chairman; Mr. George Saliba (Malta), Rapporteur; Mr. Alounkèo Kittikhoun (Lao People's Democratic Republic); and Mr. Nasser M. Al-Kidwa (Palestine). The Committee Chairman served as chairman, the Committee Rapporteur as rapporteur of the Seminar.

3. Invitations to participate in the Seminar were extended to Governments, intergovernmental organizations, organizations and agencies of the United Nations system, and non-governmental organizations. A number of experts were invited to make presentations at the Seminar.

4. The following governments were represented at the Seminar: Algeria, Argentina, Australia, Austria, Bangladesh, Belgium, Brunei Darussalam, China, Cyprus, France, Greece, India, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Jordan, Morocco, Netherlands, Oman, Pakistan, Poland, Qatar, Romania, Russian Federation, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, Tunisia, Turkey, Vietnam and Yemen.

5. The following organizations, agencies and other entities of the United Nations system participated in the Seminar: Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA); International Monetary Fund (IMF); Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator in the Occupied Territories (UNSCO); United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF); United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM); United Nations Development Programme (UNDP); United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO); United Nations High Commissioner/Centre for Human Rights (UNHC/CHR); United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA); United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA); and World Health Organization (WHO).

6. The following intergovernmental organizations were represented at the Seminar: European Community; Islamic Development Bank; and Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC).

7. The delegation of Palestine took part in the work of the Seminar.

8. The following experts presented papers:* Mr. Abdulkarim Abulhaija, Director of Palestinian Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Jordan; Mr. Hassan Abu Libdeh, President, Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, Palestinian Authority; Mr. Thiab Ayyoush, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Social

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*Mr. Mohammed Ghadia, Director, Human Development Department, Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation (MOPIC), Palestinian Authority, who had accepted the invitation to present a paper at the Seminar, was prevented by the Israeli authorities to go to Amman. His paper was made available to participants.

Affairs, Palestinian Authority; Mr. Ibrahim Dakkak, Consultant, head of the Human Development Project, Jerusalem; Ms. Muna Darwizeh, Researcher, Department of Palestinian Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Jordan; Mr. Jean-Michel Dumont, Secretary-General, Parliamentary Association for Euro-Arab Cooperation (PAEAC), Brussels; Mr. Gil Feiler, Managing Director, Info-Prod Research (Middle East), Ltd., Ramat-Gan; Ms. Maria Holt, Researcher, British Council, London; Mr. Rick Hooper, Research Director, FAFO Institute for Applied Social Science, Oslo; Mr. Khondaker Muzammel Huq, General Manager, Grameen Bank, Dhaka; Ms. Zahira Kamal, General Director, Directorate of Gender Planning and Development, Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation (MOPIC), Palestinian Authority; Mr. Patrick Kane, Director, New York office, Development Resource Center, Gaza; Mr. George Kossaifi, Chief, Human Development Section, Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), Amman; Ms. Fathiyyeh Nasru, Associate Professor and Chairperson of the University Programme Evaluation and Development (UPED), Al-Quds University, Jerusalem; Ms. Nahla Qourah, Representative, Women's Affairs Technical Committee, Ramallah; Ms. Mira D. Rizeq, Welfare Association, Geneva; Mr. Nader Izzat Sa'id, Consultant, deputy head of Human Development Project, Ramallah; and Mr. Mohammed Shtayyeh, Director-General, Palestinian Economic Council for Development and Reconstruction (PECDAR), Palestinian Authority.

9. The following non-governmental organizations participated as observers in the Seminar: Afro-Asian Peoples' Solidarity Organization, Arab Thought Forum, Arab Women's Union, Catholic Relief Services, Centre of Studies and Research on the Contemporary Middle East, Cooperation for Development, General Union of Palestinian Women, Jordanian Institute of Diplomacy, Jordanian Society for Desertification Control and Badia Development, Near East Foundation, Palestine Red Crescent Society, Palestinian Housing Council, Royal Scientific Society, Society of Inash El-Usra, UMNO Youth Malaysia and Women Studies Programme of Birzeit University. The Asian Coordinating Committee for NGOs on the Question of Palestine (ACCP) also attended.

C. Agenda

10. The purpose of the Seminar was to provide the framework for an expert discussion on promoting Palestinian human development as well as on the various related aspects of international assistance to the Palestinian people, problems of the rehabilitation and sustainable development of the Palestinian economy and efforts in the area of institution- and nation-building since May 1996, when the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People held in Cairo the last United Nations Seminar on Assistance to the Palestinian People.

11. In the plenary session and in the course of four round-table discussions, the participants addressed in-depth the following issues:

(a) Meeting Palestinian human development needs: the role of the international community;

(b) Sustainable human development as the basis for nation-building;

(c) Promoting poverty eradication and sustainable development; and

(d) Promoting gender equality and the full participation of women in society.

D. Opening of the Seminar

12. At the opening session, a statement was made by Mr. Abdullah Ensour, Deputy Prime Minister and Acting Minister of Foreign Affairs, Jordan. A

statement on behalf of the Secretary-General of the United Nations was read out by his representative Mr. Peter Hansen, Commissioner-General, United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). Statements were also made by Mr. Ibra Deguène Ka, Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, and Mr. Maher al-Masri, Minister of Economy and Trade, Palestinian Authority, Representative of Palestine.

13. In his statement, Mr. Abdullah Ensour, Deputy Prime Minister, reviewed Jordan's long-standing support of the Palestinian cause, its socio-economic assistance to the Palestinians in the occupied territories and in Jordan as well as its efforts to end the Israeli occupation. Since the establishment of the Palestinian Authority, Jordan had entered into several agreements with it which had functioned as a catalyst for others. Peace in the region had to be based on international legitimacy. Neither peace nor territories should be divided and changes effected by Israel on the ground, most recently again through settlement activities carried out in Jerusalem, had to be opposed. Urgent efforts were now required to prevent the disintegration of the peace process, which Jordan had supported from the start in Madrid.

14. In the statement read out on behalf of the Secretary-General of the United Nations by his representative Mr. Peter Hansen, Commissioner-General of UNRWA, the Secretary-General expressed the belief that the United Nations family of organizations could make an essential contribution to the peace process by helping to establish solid foundations for peace in the Palestinian territories through the development of an effective infrastructure, the building of institutional capacity and the improvement of living conditions. Every effort was being made to mobilize the resources of the United Nations system in a coherent manner within the framework of the integrated programme of assistance to the Palestinian people, adopted in 1995. While efforts to promote conditions on the ground favourable to peace and stability continued, there was considerable international concern over the future of the peace negotiations. The Secretary-General expressed the sincere hope that the parties will intensify their efforts to overcome the obstacles preventing a sustained return to the peace process.

15. Mr. Ibra Deguène Ka, Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, recalled the Committee's efforts to mobilize international assistance to promote the economic development and prosperity of the Palestinian territory. Those efforts had acquired particular intensity since the beginning of the current peace process, when the General Assembly affirmed that the United Nations had a permanent responsibility with respect to the question of Palestine until the question was resolved in all its aspects in accordance with international legitimacy. The only way forward was now to return to the path of reconciliation and normalization embarked on in 1993, and the full implementation of the agreements reached. The Committee was of the view that the new realities on the ground, which had emerged from the agreements reached, opened up many new opportunities for action by the Palestinian people, which needed the support of the international community. At the centre of development efforts and discussions was the human being. It was the individual Palestinian who suffered from hardship created by the continuing occupation, the absence of peace and the resulting problems for the development process. The improvement in Palestinians' living conditions and their prospects for a better future would contribute to creating the necessary foundations for peace.

16. In his statement, Mr. Maher al-Masri, Minister of Economy and Trade of the Palestinian Authority, representing Palestine, said that the United Nations and the international community had an essential role in restoring Palestinian rights, based on the full implementation of the peace agreements reached,

starting with the Declaration of Principles of 1993. There was now a renewed danger of conflict as the result of Israel's unwillingness to implement the relevant agreements and its continued use of measures such as the expropriation of Palestinian land and imposition of serious restrictions on the freedom of movement, affecting negatively persons, goods and services. Palestinians were experiencing an economic decline unprecedented since 1967; their right to education was impaired as students were prevented from reaching certain universities; Palestinian trade was severely restricted; and farmers suffered from land confiscations and the lack of marketing opportunities. Under such conditions, the Palestinian economy could not function based on market forces; it languished in a state of dependency. The United Nations should pursue urgently the implementation of the peace agreements to bring about peace for all peoples of the region.

II. PLENARY SESSION: MEETING PALESTINIAN HUMAN DEVELOPMENT NEEDS: THE ROLE OF THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

17. The plenary session, entitled "Meeting Palestinian human development needs: the role of the international community", comprised a keynote address and statements by representatives of organizations and entities of the United Nations system, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations. Speakers expressed unanimous support for the objective of promoting sustainable human development and called for more effective coordination of the international assistance to the Palestinian people.

18. The keynote speaker, Mr. Maher al-Masri, Minister of Economy and Trade, underlined the importance of the international community in promoting Palestinian human development. The Palestinians had to move from exporting labour to exporting goods and services, which had to be of the highest standard to be internationally competitive. To ensure such competitiveness, Palestinians had to improve schooling, teacher training and curriculum development; involve appropriately skilled Palestinian expatriates; and enhance coordination with the donor community. Vocational training had to be geared for the export markets, in particular in the area of computer technology. The speaker proposed the establishment of a permanent training institute in the Palestinian territory to advance the managerial and administrative skills of the Palestinians.

19. The representative of OIC emphasized that the Israeli occupation continued to deprive the Palestinian people of its basic economic and human rights and referred to his organization's joint ventures with the Palestinian Authority in connection with the airport at Gaza and the establishment of the Bethlehem Bank to revitalize the private sector of the Palestinian economy.

20. The representative of UNSCO outlined the efforts that the Office of the Special Coordinator was engaged in to harmonize international assistance to the Palestinians. He reported the results of the Office's most recent quarterly economic survey, which gave statistics on the deteriorating precarious economic situation in the West Bank and Gaza.

21. The representative of the United Nations High Commissioner/Centre for Human Rights considered that strengthening the rule of law was fundamental to achieving socio-economic development and provided examples of the Centre's advisory services to the Palestinians. She mentioned in particular assistance with drafting laws in conformity with international standards, the drawing up of a national plan for human rights and capacity-building projects for the police, prison administration, judiciary and Palestinian NGOs.

22. The UNFPA representative reported on activities the Fund supported in the areas of reproductive health and the promotion of the status of women, which

included discouraging early marriage and child-bearing, and projecting a generally positive image of women as empowerment in all walks of life.

23. The UNICEF representative stated that the Fund focused its financial resources on measuring progress in training and institution-building; curriculum development; health and protection of the whole child; promoting gender-equality; and alleviating poverty arising from high unemployment rates in large families.

24. The representative of UNDP drew attention to the Programme's major health, sanitation, housing and poverty alleviation projects as well as support given to the elaboration of a Palestinian agricultural development plan and programme to attract skilled Palestinian expatriates.

25. WHO's representative referred to the Organization's extensive collaboration with the Palestinian Authority in the area of health-related policy-making and legislation, women's health, emergency preparedness, and primary health care with a focus on basic development needs/quality of life approach.

26. The representative of UNRWA addressed the long-standing role her Agency had in the promotion of Palestinian human development through the provision of education, health and social services, currently to some 3.4 million refugees. There was a consensus that investment in the alleviation of poverty and the development of the human potential of the Palestinians continued to be needed until such time as there was a resolution of the Palestine refugee issue.

27. The representative of UNIFEM talked about progress made in the implementation of the Fund's post-Beijing follow-up operation in the Western Asia region, launched in November 1995. One major component of the project aimed at expanding women's contribution to the Palestinian human development process.

28. The representative of the Asian Coordinating Committee for NGOs on the Question of Palestine stated that, in the current situation, Palestinian economic and human development was fundamentally challenged and called upon the international community to redouble its efforts for peace. He informed the meeting of a proposal made at the Asian Seminar/NGO Symposium on the Question of Palestine, held at Jakarta, for the establishment of a Palestine Fund under the auspices of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries.

29. The representative of the General Union of Palestinian Women said women's active participation in all sectors of society was of primary importance in the context of Palestinian development. The empowerment of women based on self-reliance and democratic institutions was the centre of the Union's survival strategy under occupation.

30. In his concluding remarks, the key note speaker, Mr. al-Masri, said that Israeli measures continued to prevent assistance to reach the Palestinians, interfering with each individual's human development.

III. SUMMARY OF THE ROUND TABLES

Round table I. Sustainable human development as the basis for nation-building

31. The round table was moderated by Mr. Rick Hooper. Panelists addressed the following sub-topics: the efforts of the Palestinian Authority to promote sustainable human development; the human development profile of the Palestinian

territory; the sustainable human development framework: experience from other countries; and the contribution of the Palestinian diaspora.

32. Mr. Mohammed Shtayyeh, Director-General, PECDAR, stated that under the present political and socio-economic conditions, the Palestinians were merely engaged in 'damage control' instead of the promotion of development. Israel continued its many stifling practices, such as the closures and expropriation of Palestinian land, affecting the Palestinian economy with disastrous consequences. Only some five per cent of the assistance pledged by the donor community for 1997 had been received. With regard to human development, primary health care and reaching out to the poor, especially women, continued to be important. The low salaries for teachers as well as the absence of a Palestinian curriculum and of appropriate textbooks exacerbated the difficulties faced by the educational system; education and the labour market were disjointed, especially in the area of vocational training, which required special attention together with the training of former detainees. Institution-building and job creation programmes were cited as other important avenues for promoting Palestinian human development.

33. Mr. Ibrahim Dakkak, Consultant, Jerusalem, introduced the forthcoming study on the Palestinian Human Development Profile. He stated in his presentation that the success of Palestinian human development and its sustainability were linked to the degree to which the Palestinian Authority was enabled and empowered to develop Palestinian society. The main obstacle to the enjoyment of the principles and rights contained in the 1986 United Nations Declaration on the Right to Development was the continued denial of the Palestinians' right to self-determination and the unabated process of disempowering them. Nevertheless, with the participation by the Palestinian public, the Palestinian Authority could produce a credible development perspective for the Palestinian economy; education and culture; health; social conditions and human rights. The imbalance in development across the various Palestinian areas had to be overcome and reliable statistics be made available, spearheaded by the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics. Moreover, support for democratic institutions, the rule of law and human rights was required for the fledgling Palestinian system of governance to flourish.

34. Mr. Abdulkarim Abulhaija, Director of Palestinian Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Amman, Jordan, stated that the peace process was paralyzed and that the United Nations had an important role in relaunching it. Hope for peace that had been renewed in the early 1990s was now unjustified in view of the continuation of Israeli practices curtailing the rights of Palestinians, in violation of international standards. The international donor community was called upon to rebuild the infrastructure in the occupied territories and fulfill its pledges to counterbalance the economic cost incurred by the Palestinians as the result of Israel's closure policy, to eradicate pockets of poverty and to raise the standard of living of Palestinians. Peace had to be strengthened in all its aspects.

35. Mr. George Kossaifi, Chief, Human Development Section, ESCWA, presented highlights of the Commission's efforts promoting human development in Arab countries through the establishment of national networks. Each network, some already created, some under consideration, were to function as a focal point in order to become the mechanism used by ministries, civil organizations and research centres in their pursuit of national sustainable human development. An Arab strategy and a programme of implementation would complement national efforts. The speaker indicated that recently the Palestinian Authority had requested ESCWA to assist in the establishment of a Palestinian network for sustainable human development activities. With regard to the Palestinian situation, he emphasized that foreign occupation and human development were incompatible.

36. In the ensuing discussion, participants noted with appreciation that a Palestinian Human Development Profile had been prepared and would be published shortly. The discussion focused on a programme for human development for the Palestinian territory. It was emphasized that a national committee for sustainable human development should be formed to be the focal point for that purpose. The Ministry for Social Affairs as well as PECDAR should have an important role in such a committee. Any human development programme should take into account the specific demographic structure of the Palestinian territories, where fifty per cent of the population were under the age of sixteen. It was said that only one third of the Palestinians lived in these territories; any successful programme would have to include the diaspora and take advantage of its diversity. The linkage between human development and progress in the peace process was stressed by all speakers. The current stage could hardly be described as a transition period; urgent changes in the policies carried out by the occupying Power were required to allow a minimum of economic development. As a first important step, the safe passage between the West Bank and Gaza should be established and ensured to maintain territorial integrity.

Round table II. Promoting poverty eradication and sustainable development

37. The first part of this round table was moderated by Ms. Maria Holt. It addressed the following sub-topics: the need for information on the extent and root causes of poverty; improving access to basic infrastructure and social services for all; promoting job creation and sustainable livelihoods: the role of the private sector.

38. Mr. Hassan Abu Libdeh, President, Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, Palestinian Authority, discussed specific aspects of the informational and conceptual needs in connection with combatting poverty. In the past, Israel had fully controlled the collection, analysis and publication of statistical data and, for instance, excluded Jerusalem annexed in 1967 from their surveys of Palestinians living under occupation. Since 1993, the Palestinians had undertaken a variety of statistical studies on a monthly and annual basis to determine household incomes and expenditures as well as on the situation of men, women and children to monitor progress with regard to the relevant international instruments protecting their rights. Primary indicators needed to be rounded out conceptually to arrive at a comprehensive definition of quality of life and poverty. In addition, the speaker underlined the importance of studying the spatial aspects of poverty to identify pockets of poverty in the occupied Palestinian territories and of surveying the Palestinians living in the diaspora.

39. Mr. Rick Hooper, Research Director, FAFO Institute for Applied Social Science, Oslo, discussed the pitfalls of a donor strategy that had been designed to provide assistance to the Palestinians under progressively improving living conditions. Instead, because of the deteriorating socio-economic conditions brought about largely as the result of Israel's almost permanent closure of the occupied Palestinian territories, much of the $1 billion assistance received since 1993 had to be spent on short-term job creation programmes and income support rather than the envisaged longer-term investment in infrastructure and institution-building. Whereas absolute poverty was not widespread, notably as the result of remittances sent by Palestinians from abroad and the support given through the informal family and kinship system prevailing in the occupied Palestinian territories, sustainable development was not possible in the current situation. The speaker suggested the following priority areas for sustainable development: small-scale community development projects, including in villages; school construction; small business loans.

40. In his presentation, Mr. Jean-Michel Dumont, Secretary-General, Parliamentary Association for Euro-Arab Cooperation (PAEAC), addressed the deterioration of the Palestinian economy as the result of the Israeli closures of the Palestinian territories in terms of a decline in GDP, high unemployment and a growing public sector deficit, which were poorly compensated for by the donor community. Private sector-led recovery, largely based on trade, only remained a hope unless permanent links between the West Bank and Gaza as well as the rest of the world were established and more Palestinian workers were allowed to earn a living in Israel. Israel was urged to abide by the various political and economic international agreements it had reached in connection with the peace process, as well as the Barcelona process initiated in November 1995, which associated the Euro-Mediterranean partnership to peace in the Middle East. The speaker was of the view that Europe, as the largest financial contributor to the peace process, should go further in exerting pressure to ensure respect for the agreements.

41. In his presentation, Mr. Patrick Kane, Director, New York office, Development Resource Center, Gaza, stated that the constraints on the development of the Palestinian private sector resulted from the day-to-day political situation and the trade regime, for instance closures and economic barriers, as well as the negative effects resulting from thirty years of occupation. In addition, issues such as the capacity of Palestinian producers to supply goods and services to the local market and for external trade, as well as the generally small size of Palestinian enterprises, equally had to be taken into account when promoting the development of the Palestinian economy. The paper focussed on such 'supply capacity' issues within the Palestinian manufacturing sector and the way in which the capacity of Palestinian firms could be improved, drawing on examples from the plastics industry in Gaza.

42. Mr. Thiab Ayyoush, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Social Affairs, Palestinian Authority, elaborated some of the principles and concepts underlining poverty eradication policies, ranging from traditional notions of charity to various forms of redistributive public sector intervention. When basic needs of a person were not met, poverty existed. The assessment of needs had to take into account income and expenditure patterns and the many intangible characteristics of Palestinian households. The root causes of poverty were seen to lie in a whole gamut of cultural, demographic, psychological, economic and political features of both the individual and society. Palestinians did not benefit from national sovereignty and other inalienable rights and were therefore fundamentally hampered in their development. In its poverty eradication policies, the Palestinian Authority concentrated on helping the most vulnerable sectors of society; loans to small enterprises, especially those run by women; education grants; and other programmes in the social domain, including the rehabilitation and integration into society of former prisoners.

43. The second part of the round table was moderated by Mr. George Kossaifi. The session considered the following sub-topics: promoting broad-based and equitable growth: needs and opportunities (industrial parks, tourism, handicrafts, rural development, etc.); and meeting Palestinian human resource development needs through training, development of appropriate labour standards.

44. Mr. Gil Feiler, Managing Director, Info-Prod Research (Middle East), Ltd., Ramat-Gan, Israel, said that Palestinians were in the midst of economic decline as the result of Israeli and Palestinian policies. Israel continued its policy of imposing closures on the Palestinian territories. Palestinian investment law and incentives were absent. The future well-being of the West Bank and Gaza Strip depended on the Palestinian Authority's ability adequately to tackle the tightly linked dynamic elements of economic growth: trade, investment and labour. In his view, Palestinian investment opportunities abounded in

manufacturing, centering on border industrial parks and other joint ventures carried out with an Israeli partner, tourism and certain natural resources as well as agricultural and rural development. He called for the undertaking of such joint ventures by Israel and the Palestinian Authority, since even a small-scale project could have a positive multiplier effect in terms of confidence-building and attracting other foreign investment.

45. Ms. Muna Darwizeh, Researcher at the Department of Palestinian Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Jordan, described Jordan's growing experience in promoting sustainable human development in connection with the national human development report project. Jordan had set up an interministerial committee and several working groups to coordinate the preparation of the report and facilitate the implementation of poverty eradication programmes, called social security network. The strategic human development plan had three main features. First, the objective of the plan was to reach the poorest strata of society, for instance, by providing the most destitute individuals with material aid, improving the infrastructure of their immediate environment, ensuring pollution-free drinking water and sanitary local living conditions and launching vocational on-the-job training exercises. Second, the implementation of the plan had to be feasible at a low cost and, third, the strategy had to be easy to follow, realistic and sustainable.

46. Mr. Khondaker Muzammel Huq, General Manager, Grameen Bank, Dhaka, Bangladesh, argued that it was possible to eradicate poverty and promote sustainable development by investing in the poor, most effectively women. Based on his long practical experience in this area, Mr. Huq regarded poverty as a denial of human rights that could be alleviated by creating self-employment with the help of investment capital financing micro-enterprises. The Grameen Bank, established in 1983, was presently lending US$ 27 million a month in Bangladesh and, through over 1,000 branches there, provided capital to over two million borrowers, of which 94 per cent were women. It has assisted local initiatives in more than 60 countries on all continents to start Grameen type of micro-credit programmes for the poor, particularly women. National debates should be initiated to decide on the nature, role and objectives of poverty eradication programmes. To that end, the Palestinian Authority could explore partnerships with civil institutions and organizations, and development assistance planning should be carried out in collaboration with the envisaged recipients.

47. Ms. Mira D. Rizeq, Welfare Association, Geneva, focused her presentation on rural development and poverty eradication, with emphasis on rural women, vocational training and the need for gender-sensitive labour standards. Agriculture was regarded as an important source of income for the rural Palestinian population, especially women, that did not benefit sufficiently from declining international assistance. Investment supporting rural productive activities, particularly small-holder agriculture, yielded the greatest income generation benefits. Poverty-related programmes ought to seek greater participation of future beneficiaries and make better use of the many advantages presented by non-governmental organizations. Information on the location and extent of poverty among the Palestinians, 'poverty mapping', was greatly needed and should become a priority of a comprehensive national strategy aimed at poverty alleviation.

48. During the discussions held under round table II, participants said that without sovereignty, self-determination, territorial integrity and democracy efforts towards sustainable human development and eradication of poverty would not succeed. The Palestinians were being deprived of their land and sovereignty over their natural resources, in particular water. Palestinians ought to be able to claim compensation for losses sustained. International pressure upon Israel to implement the peace agreements reached was now urgently

required to create basic conditions for the promotion of Palestinian human development. The continued absence of sovereignty must not result in frustration. Any action in favour of the Palestinian people would strengthen their efforts to attain self-determination A number of participants commented on the policies of the donor countries and organizations. In their view, some donor countries had decided to deal with certain short-term weaknesses of the Palestinian economy and to offer palliative remedies, ignoring central, longer-term issues. It was emphasized that donors had a responsibility to support the basic human rights of the Palestinian people, including its right to self-determination. At the same time, the positive contribution made by many donor governments was stressed. With regard to a strategy promoting human development and eradicating poverty, it was stressed that the Palestinian Authority had the principal responsibility for policy formulation. NGOs had an important role to play in that area and should participate in the planning and implementation process. Both sectors should coordinate their efforts. NGOs had a lot to contribute in the field of poverty eradication, based on their longstanding work involving community development projects, cooperatives and programmes geared towards the disadvantaged.

Round table III. Promoting gender equality and the full participation of women in society

49. The round table was moderated by Mr. Patrick Kane. It addressed the following sub-topics: the Beijing platform for action and its implications for Palestinian women; the need for collecting gender-specific data; assessing current legislation and policies from a gender perspective; empowering women through education and training; encouraging women entrepreneurs: micro-credit and other initiatives for small-scale business.

50. In her presentation, Ms. Maria Holt, Researcher, British Council, London, reflected on what Palestinian women were entitled to expect in a future Palestinian state, arguing that, so far, the transition from an ad-hoc, non-governmental women's movement into formal participation in the embryonic government had been an unsatisfactory process. Palestinian women were seeking greater participation in all areas of their society. Although not binding on the Palestinian Authority, the Platform for Action adopted at the world women's conference held in Beijing in 1995 provided an international standard by which progress for women could be measured, in terms of poverty, access to education and health care services, domestic violence, inequality between men and women in the spheres of economic and political power and the protection of women's reproductive rights. The lack of legal rights for Palestinian women was unlikely to be satisfactorily resolved until a Palestinian state existed.

51. Ms. Fathiyyeh Nasru, Associate Professor and Chairperson of the University Programme Evaluation and Development (UPED), Al-Quds University, Jerusalem, pointed to the difficulties faced by the Palestinian education system in overcoming the effects of occupation. She presented figures for 1995/1996 on student enrollment and teachers employment in the Palestinian schools that showed an increase in female participation. The number of women university faculty members holding the Ph.D. is still low (6.6%) among the total Ph.D. holders in the Palestinian universities. The speaker stressed that empowering women through education and training was a central issue in promoting human development. Palestinian educational philosophy was considered as egalitarian, community-oriented and geared towards self-actualization of the student. Breaking down the perceptual dichotomy of male and female, as early as in nursery school education, would effectively promote equality. Based on a specific project proposal, the speaker advanced that a nursery school system, coupled with community awareness programmes, could enhance the role of education in accelerating the development of Palestinian society.

52. Mr. Nader Izzat Sa'id, Consultant, Ramallah, stated that Palestinian women had played a major role in the national struggle and in fighting the socio-economic decline resulting from the Israeli occupation. Women were now taking part in the reconstruction process. Women constituted some 15 per cent of the formal work force, confined to the service sector, and contributed to over 50 per cent of the informal labour market, particularly in agriculture, where their work continued to be undervalued. Whereas Palestinian women's political rights were increasingly being accepted, their economic and even less so social and personal rights were less accepted. It was now important to invest in women's capabilities and include them fully in the development of Palestinian society. The speaker made several suggestions on how women could be included in the Palestinian development process, for instance, through comprehensive, gender-sensitive policies; a quota system favouring the equal participation of women in decision-making, including at the highest levels; a proper remuneration of women's work; the elimination of violence against women; the updating of the personal status law; and the compliance with the principles enshrined in the relevant international instruments and conventions, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women.

53. Ms. Zahira Kamal, General Director, Directorate of Gender Planning and Development, MOPIC, stated that successful development required the formulation of policies which ensured access of women to economic resources, all levels of decision-making, training, science and technology, the media and markets to further their advancement and empowerment. Until recently, the training of women with a view to their effective contribution to development had been ignored. Progress had been made in certain areas such as the legal field, including electoral law; participation in elections and the work of the public sector; training in leadership skills; human rights; and advocacy groups. Within the Palestinian Authority, a committee had been formed to coordinate activities of the women's departments of the various ministries. The speaker made several proposals to promote sustainable human development based on the equal participation of Palestinian women and men. These included the upgrading of organizational skills, training in programme design and evaluation and investment in poor and rural women. A working strategy for the advancement of women should now be developed.

54. Ms. Nahla Qourah, Representative of the Women's Affairs Technical Committee, founded in 1992 in preparation of negotiations between the Palestine Liberation Organization and Israel, placed the work of the Committee in the context of Palestinian women's long years of struggle for national liberation. The Committee represented a coalition of women advocating equality in Palestinian society and abolishing all forms of discrimination against women, in preparation for the build-up of a democratic civic society characterized by social justice. Mainstreaming women's issues had led to some tangible improvements in the situation of Palestinian women. For instance, passports could be obtained without written consent of so-called guardians, widows could obtain passports for their children without the permission of a brother or father and driving lessons could be taken without a male chaperone. Moreover, married female pupils were no longer being dismissed from school; school curricula had become more gender-sensitive; the percentage of women in public sector decision-making posts was growing; and the draft Palestinian constitution now emphasized the principle of equality of men and women.

55. In the course of the discussion, all speakers emphasized the importance of promoting gender equality in the Palestinian territory. A number of them described their concrete projects in that regard. The Israeli occupation with all its consequences, including violence by Israeli soldiers against Palestinian women, was identified as the major obstacle to implementing the projects undertaken in that field. At the same time, it was said that the issue of full participation of women was a sensitive one within Palestinian

society, which required time and sustained efforts to prepare the ground for its cultural, political and philosophical evolution. There was an urgent need for training women leaders, which should be followed by their appointments to senior positions in Palestinian institutions. A particular effort was needed to promote the girl-child as a future equal member of society. The importance of the Palestinian family in changing society's perception of the role of men and women was noted, within the Muslim and Arab context. New forms of upbringing of children and education were required. Programmes should not only focus on women, but also involve men to convince them of the concrete benefits resulting from sharing an equal role with women in human development.

IV. CLOSING SESSION

56. Closing statements were made by the representatives of Jordan and Palestine, and by Mr. Ibra Deguène Ka, Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People.

57. In his statement, Mr. Maher Nashashibi, Ambassador and Director of the Department of International and Regional Organizations, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Jordan, said that the meeting reflected the broad will of the international community to assist the Palestinian people. He emphasized that the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territory had been identified as the main obstacle to development and called for new efforts by the international community to relaunch the peace process. He reassured the Palestinian people of the constant and continued support of Jordan in its struggle for self-determination.

58. Mr. Maher al-Masri, Minister of Economy and Trade of the Palestinian Authority, said that all the initiatives and ideas being raised during the Seminar's deliberations would help everyone involved in projects to assist the Palestinian people to establish priorities for the future. He said that the current period facing the Palestinian people was different from the past with a new economy forming, internationally and regionally, in particular in the Middle East and the Mediterranean with closer ties to Europe. A main task for the Palestinian Authority remained to overcome the division of the Palestinian territory that made a free flow of goods and true communication impossible. A proper Palestinian infrastructure was needed with a port and airport. He said that the current political crisis effects all fields of the work of the Palestinian Authority. He encouraged the Committee to continue to help the Palestinian people to establish its own effective institutions.

59. In his concluding remarks, Mr. Ibra Deguène Ka, Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, said that the Committee had always attached importance to the various aspects of socio-economic development and the improvement of living conditions of the Palestinian people. Since the beginning of the Madrid peace process, and particularly in the last four years, the task of Palestinian economic reconstruction had evolved as a key factor affecting its pace and progress. It was in that period that the Committee had decided to devote a special place in its annual programmes of work to the socio-economic issues of the transitional stage. Motivated by the desire to mobilize development resources for the emerging Palestinian nation, the Committee had decided once again to convene a seminar on assistance to the Palestinian people in 1997 to focus on promoting Palestinian human development. The deliberations showed unanimous support for the sustainable human development approach and many proposals were made on how to apply it to the Palestinian territory. Participants expressed great concern for the future of the peace process, in view of the policies and actions of the occupying Power, and the grave deterioration of Palestinian living conditions. It was stressed that foreign occupation had to end before real human development could take place.